

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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TAGS: ELAB, CA
SUBJ: QUEBEC CIVIL SERVANTS PREPARING FOR POSSIBLE STRIKE IN
OCTOBER

REF: A) QUEBEC 0205 B) QUEBEC 0208

1. QUEBEC'S CIVIL SERVICE UNION (SFPQ), REPRESENTING SOME 35,500 WHITE- AND BLUE-COLLAR WORKERS, WILL FILE A FORMAL REQUEST FOR MEDIATION IN ITS CONTRACT TALKS WITH THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT AT THE END OF THIS MONTH, CLEARING THE WAY FOR A LEGAL STRIKE AT THE BEGINNING OF OCTOBER. THE CIVIL SERVANTS HAVE BEEN WITHOUT A CONTRACT SINCE JUNE 30. AN SFPQ WALKOUT, SHOULD IT OCCUR, WOULD BE THE FIRST MAJOR STRIKE OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES AT THE PROVINCIAL LEVEL SINCE THE ELECTION OF THE PQ, AND WOULD HAVE A MAJOR INFLUENCE ON NEGOTIATIONS IN OTHER PUBLIC AND PARA-PUBLIC SECTORS, WHERE MOST CONTRACTS ARE DUE TO EXPIRE IN JUNE 1979 (REF B).

2. THE SFPQ'S 27,500 WHITE-COLLAR WORKERS ARE DEMANDING A THREE-YEAR CONTRACT CONTAINING A 15.5 PERCENT WAGE HIKE FOR 1978, 8 PERCENT FOR 1979, AND 7 PERCENT FOR 1980. THE UNION'S 8,000 BLUE-COLLAR WORKERS ARE DEMANDING A FIRST-YEAR WAGE INCREASE OF UNCLASSIFIED

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22 PERCENT. OTHER MAJOR POINTS OF CONTENTION WITH THE GOVERNMENT INCLUDE PROMOTION AND JOB CLASSIFICATION ISSUES AND THE GOQ'S CURRENT PROGRAM TO DECENTRALISE GOVERNMENT OFFICES. (IN AN EFFORT TO STIMULATE THE ECONOMY IN QUEBEC'S HARD-PRESSED HINTERLANDS, THE GOQ IS PLANNING TO MOVE A NUMBER OF GOVERNMENT OFFICES FROM QUEBEC CITY TO SMALLER TOWNS.

THIS HAS ELICITED STRONG PROTEST FROM CIVIL SERVANTS NOT WISHING TO MOVE. THE SFPQ HAS PROPOSED THAT EMPLOYEES IN A "DECENTRALISED" OFFICE BE GUARANTEED A JOB ELSEWHERE IN THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD THEY ELECT NOT TO MOVE.)

3. THE GOQ HAS COUNTERED BY NAMING A PROFESSIONAL NEGOTIATOR, RICHARD DROUIN, AS SPOKESMAN FOR THE GOVERNMENT SIDE. DROUIN HAD THE SAME JOB FOR THE BOURASSA GOVERNMENT DURING THE LAST CONTRACT DISPUTE WITH THE SFPQ IN 1976. HIS NOMINATION RUNS DIRECTLY COUNTER TO A PQ ELECTORAL PROMISE TO CHOOSE ITS NEGOTIATORS FROM WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT RATHER THAN TO RESORT TO OUTSIDE PROFESSION LAWYER-NEGOTIATORS. SFPQ SPOKESMEN HAVE TAUNTED THE GOQ FOR THIS TURNAROUND ("NOW THAT THEY'RE IN POWER THEY ARE THE BOSSES AND THEY'RE ACTING LIKE BOSSES") BUT HAVE OTHERWISE PRONOUNCED THEMSELVES HAPPY WITH THE CHOICE OF DROUIN, "A PRO WHO KNOWS HIS BUSINESS, KNOWS WHICH BUTTON TO PUSH IN THE GOVERNMENT, AND WHO WILL SAVE US TIME BY BREAKING IN THE GOVERNMENT NEGOTIATORS."

4. COMMENT: THE GOQ HAS REASON TO BE UNEASY OVER THESE NEGOTIATIONS

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THE SFPQ WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WILDCAT WALKOUT OVER BILL 50 LAST MONTH, AND MANAGED TO BLOCK ACCESS TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR SEVERAL HOURS (REF A). AT THAT TIME THE GOVERNMENT REACTED VERY FIRMLY AND THE STRIKE, WHICH APPEARS NOT TO HAVE HAD WIDESPREAD SUPPORT AMONG THE CIVIL SERVANTS, PETERED OUT. THE SFPQ
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LEADERSHIP FEELS THAT IT WAS BURNED THAT TIME AND HAS NO INTENTION OF BACKING DOWN AGAIN. SHOULD A STRIKE BE CALLED FOR THE BEGINNING OF OCTOBER, IT WOULD COINCIDE WITH RESUMPTION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SESSION AFTER THE SUMMER BREAK, AS WELL AS WITH THE PQ'S PROJECTED KICKOFF OF ITS "OUI AU REFERENDUM" CAMPAIGN. AND, OF COURSE, THERE ARE THE ALL-IMPORTANT CONTRACT TALKS WITH THE OTHER PUBLIC AND PARA-PUBLIC WORKERS, PARTICULARLY THE HOSPITAL WORKERS, WHICH ARE DUE TO START AT THE END OF THE YEAR.
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